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CIA Agents Trained Palace Guards

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

It can now be revealed that CIA agents have trained the elite units that guard favored foreign monarchs, premiers and dictators.

This has given the CIA contacts close to the seat of power, according to our sources, in such countries as Ethiopia, Indonesia, Jordan, Laos, Somalia, South Korea, South Vietnam and Thailand.

The CIA has been training palace guards for more than two decades. In the process, the agency has quietly developed some body guards into informants and used others to influence palace policy-making.

Thailand is typical. The crack, 60-man protective force, which guards King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit, is directed by a trusted CIA trainee. He is Lt. Gen. Vitoon Yasawad, who also led the CIA's Thai irregulars in Laos until the 1973 cease-fire.

"Whoever controls the palace guard in Thailand, controls the crown," one Asia-wise, ex-CIA operative told us. He claimed the CIA has run the palace guard in Bangkok since the 1950s.

Once, high government officials escaped from one of Thailand's periodic coups and sought sanctuary in the basement of a CIA agent, our sources recall.

Fletcher Prouty, a former Air Force officer who had been attached to the CIA, described how the CIA saved former Prime Minister Sirit Thanarat in an even more dashing exploit. The prime minister was recuperating in a Tokyo hospital, Prouty told us, when a coup began to develop back in Bangkok.

The CIA rushed the ailing field marshal home in a U. S. military plane, and the CIA-trained bodyguards responded with such a bristling display of efficiency that the coup was averted.

Yasawad's present protective force is armed with Thai-made, German-designed, rapid-fire rifles and is skilled at handling explosives.

Members were trained not far from the big U. S. base at Korat, which became a CIA sub-center during the Vietnam war and is still a major intelligence outpost.

Yasawad has acknowledged only the existence of his special, 60-man protective force, which is called SWATS for Special Weapons and Tactics. He has denied any CIA connection with his elite unit.

Energy Muddle — The leaders in Washington simply don't seem to be able to get together on an energy policy. Yet the nation is in desperate need of a program that will assure enough energy to run our factories, heat our homes and operate our automobiles for the next decade.

In the White House, President Ford has proclaimed there is an energy crisis and has called upon all Americans to sacrifice. Yet Secretary of the Treasury William E. Simon is saying there is plenty of petroleum just waiting to be pumped from the Alaskan oil fields and offshore oil beds.

On Capitol Hill, Speaker Carl Albert has warned his colleagues privately that the United States must launch an emergency program to develop energy, on the scale of the Manhattan Project which developed the atomic bomb in World War II. But he has been unable to persuade the various House committees, which have jurisdiction over various phases of the energy problem, to work together for a common solution.

We have been bombarded with letters from troubled Americans who are willing to sacrifice for their country but don't know what to do. "How serious is the crisis?" pleaded a Riverside, Calif., housewife. "Isn't there someone in Washington who will tell it like it is?"

The people are willing to face the facts; it's the leadership that's lacking.

Jaundiced Judge? — Federal regulations lowering the lead content of gasoline recently were overturned by the courts. The judge who wrote the decision, it now develops, is a former counsel to a major supplier of lead concentrates.

The decision was written by Judge Malcolm Wilkey, of the U. S. Court of Appeals here, who called the federal guidelines eliminating lead from gasoline "capricious" and "arbitrary."

We have now learned that the judge for seven years was general counsel to Kennecott Copper, whose Ozark subsidiary produces much of the lead concentrates used in leaded gasoline.

A spokesman for the judge asserted that there was "no conflict of interest" in the decision. He refused to answer specific questions, however, about Judge Wilkey's present relationship with Kennecott. The spokesman would neither confirm nor deny reports that the judge has a current financial interest in Kennecott Copper.

A Kennecott spokesman said it was "against company policy" to divulge the names of corporate stockholders.

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